

The Limits of China's Soft Power in Europe  
Beijing's Public Diplomacy Puzzle

Ingrid d'Hooghe

January 2010

NETHERLANDS INSTITUTE OF INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS  
'CLINGENDAEL'

CIP-Data Koninklijke Bibliotheek, The Hague

D'Hooghe Ingrid: The Limits of China's Soft Power in Europe: Beijing's Public  
Diplomacy Puzzle

The Hague, Netherlands Institute of International Relations 'Clingendael'  
Clingendael Diplomacy Papers No. 25  
ISBN: 978-90-5031-1502



*Desktop publishing by Ragnhild Drange*

Netherlands Institute of International Relations 'Clingendael'  
*Clingendael Diplomatic Studies Programme*  
Clingendael 7  
2597 VH The Hague  
Telephone +31(0)70 - 3746628  
Telefax +31(0)70 - 3746666  
P.O. Box 93080  
2509 AB The Hague  
Email: [rdrange@clingendael.nl](mailto:rdrange@clingendael.nl)  
Website: <http://www.clingendael.nl>

The Netherlands Institute of International Relations 'Clingendael' is an independent institute for research, training and public information on international affairs. It publishes the results of its own research projects and the monthly *Internationale Spectator* and offers a broad range of courses and conferences covering a wide variety of international issues. It also maintains a library and documentation centre.

© Netherlands Institute of International Relations 'Clingendael'. All rights reserved. No part of this paper may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted, in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording, or otherwise, without the prior written permission of the copyright-holders. Clingendael Institute, P.O. Box 93080, 2509 AB The Hague, The Netherlands.

# Contents

---

<b>Introduction</b>	1
<b>The Sender's Side: China's Wielding of Soft Power in Europe</b>	3
The Chinese Discourse on Soft Power	3
The Goals and Contents of China's Soft Power Projection towards Europe	6
<b>The Receiving Side: European Perceptions</b>	11
Measuring European Perceptions of China	12
Overall Perceptions of China	14
Perceptions of China's Growing Influence	15
The Impact of the Economic Crisis	18
Perceptions of China's Foreign Policy and Diplomacy	19
Perceptions of China's Political Values	21
Perceptions of China's Culture	23
<b>Analysis of the Poll Results</b>	25
The Three Major European Powers' Relationships with China	25
Interpreting the Poll Results	27
<b>The Limits of China's Soft Power in Europe</b>	29
The Main Obstacle to a Successful Chinese Public Diplomacy:	
The Lack of Credibility	30
Perceptions of China: A Matter of Soft or Hard Power?	32
<b>Conclusions</b>	35

# Introduction\*

---

For a rising power like China, soft power and image management are essential aspects of its diplomacy. Soft power has to make China's rise palatable to the world and has to create understanding, regard and ultimately support for China's political model and policies. It has to help China to win friends and allies, and to advance the country's agenda. It is therefore no surprise that building and projecting soft power have been put firmly on China's international agenda, including its agenda for Europe.

Although China's soft power has serious limits, the country and its policies attract much interest in Europe: developments in China top European agendas and fill newspaper pages; governments, businessmen and scholars are discussing the challenges and opportunities that their countries face *vis-à-vis* a rising China; Chinese cultural festivals and exhibitions draw large numbers of visitors; and an increasing number of young Europeans are learning Chinese in school. Everybody in Europe is watching China and everybody—well informed or not—has an opinion about China. These opinions are often ambiguous: on many issues, in particular political matters, perceptions are negative; but at the same time Europeans seem intrigued by, and attracted to, China.

---

\*) This paper will also be published as a chapter in Sook-jong Lee and Jan Melissen (eds), *Soft Power and Public Diplomacy in East Asia* (Forthcoming in 2010).

One of the questions that arises when looking at China's image and influence in Europe is to what extent this image is based on China's soft power. Is Europe's attraction to China shaped by China's culture and political values or is Europe mainly attracted to China's growing economic might and international stature? In cases of the latter, should that be considered soft power?

In order to explore the relation between China's soft power and China's influence in Europe, this Clingendael Diplomacy Paper looks at perceptions of China's soft power in three European countries: France; Germany; and the United Kingdom. It analyses the projection of China's soft power towards Europe, in particular by means of public diplomacy, and discusses obstacles to building and projecting soft power in Europe at both the sender's (China) and the receiver's (Europe) side. On the sender's side, these obstacles include China's lack of credibility and legitimacy, and its misconceptions about European values. On the receiver's side, preconceived notions and expectations of China form an obstacle, as they make European audiences less-willing receivers of China's projected soft power. The paper subsequently analyses perceptions on the basis of the results of various polls about China in the three European countries. It explores the possibility of explaining changes and differences in European perceptions of China by looking at the development and character of the relationship between the three countries and by placing perceptions of China in the context of major international events.

# The Sender's Side: China's Wielding of Soft Power in Europe

---

## *The Chinese Discourse on Soft Power*

China is well aware of the importance of improving internationally held perceptions by projecting soft power and is actively exploring the concept's possibilities. The term 'soft power' has found its way into China's academic discourse, as well as into the speeches and documents of China's highest leaders.<sup>1</sup> The term 'soft power' was mentioned, for example, by Communist Party Secretary-General Hu Jintao in one of the most important and broadly endorsed documents of China's political system: his report to the 17th Congress of the Communist Party of China.<sup>2</sup> Various government organizations—such as ministries, the State Council Information Office and the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference (CPPCC)—are discussing ways to exercise China's soft power by means of public diplomacy. However, it is the academic debate on soft power and public diplomacy strategies that has been expanding

- 
- 1) Ingrid d'Hooghe, 'Into High Gear: China's Public Diplomacy', *The Hague Journal of Diplomacy*, vol. 3, no. 1, 2008, pp. 37–61, at p. 39.
  - 2) Hu Jintao's report to the 17th Party Congress of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP), 15 October 2007, Part VII. The text is available on the CCP's website at <http://english.cpc.people.com.cn>.

and deepening most rapidly in the past few years. Chinese academic works were initially focused on introducing and evaluating the concept of soft power as it was put forward by Joseph Nye, but soon they took the discussion one step ahead to analysing critically and developing Nye's ideas by adapting them to suit China's situation.<sup>3</sup> China has come to see soft power as a fundamental component of its comprehensive national power, which includes economic, military and political power. In the words of Tsinghua University's Professor Yan Xuetong, 'during a period of globalization, the sphere of competition is no longer about land, resources or markets but rule-making, setting regulations, norms or customs'.<sup>4</sup> China wants to play a role in establishing these rules and norms. Building soft power is a way to advance China's domestic and international agenda, to guard Beijing against criticism, and to boost the country's international standing.

A notable difference between the Chinese and international discourses is that officials and academics in China have from the start discussed soft power and public diplomacy in the domestic as much as in the international context.<sup>5</sup> The public diplomacy department of China's Ministry of Foreign Affairs, for example, mainly organizes activities to inform domestic, not international, audiences about China's foreign policy and diplomacy. The domestic aspect is also clearly indicated in the above-mentioned speech by President Hu, who declared soft power not only a major component of national comprehensive power but also an 'important source for national cohesion'.<sup>6</sup>

In their discussion of soft power and public diplomacy, Chinese policy-makers pay much attention to the role of the media in enhancing or damaging the country's image. Beijing is deeply sensitive to foreign perceptions of China and its policies abroad. Both foreign appraisals of China's diplomatic performance and negative perceptions of China's domestic situation are often mentioned and quoted in articles in the Chinese press.<sup>7</sup> The State Council Information Office carefully follows and evaluates foreign media coverage of China's development and holds the Western media partially responsible for China's negative image in the West. This was recently illustrated again when Western media coverage of the unrest in Tibet in March 2008 was heavily

---

3) Li Mingjiang, *Soft Power in Chinese Discourse: Popularity, Parameter and Prospect*, Working Paper no. 165 (Singapore: S. Rajaratnam School of International Studies, September 2008), p. 5; see also Zhao Kejin, *Gonggongwajiao de lilun yu shijian* [Public Diplomacy: Theory and Practice] (Shanghai: Shanghai Cishu Publishers, 2007), chapters 1–6.

4) Yan Xuetong cited in Mark Leonard, *What does China Think?* (New York: PublicAffairs, 2008), p. 94

5) Ingrid d'Hooghe, *The Rise of China's Public Diplomacy*, Clingendael Diplomacy Paper no. 12 (The Hague: Clingendael Institute, July 2007), p. 6.

6) Hu Jintao's report to the 17th Party Congress of the CCP, 15 October 2007, Part VII.

7) Ingrid d'Hooghe, *The Rise of China's Public Diplomacy*, p. 18.

condemned by China's leaders and population. Their anger was vented in newspapers and in innumerable Chinese blogs. It even led to the creation of an anti-Western media website that aims to show 'the true despicable and shameless face of Western media'.<sup>8</sup>

Most officials and many academics see China's traditional culture as the most important resource for building soft power.<sup>9</sup> China's culture has a long history of holding great attraction to the West. In imperial times, China's high civilization and accompanying values were not imposed in any way on the outside world, but wherever foreign traders and envoys told their stories about the Middle Kingdom, people felt attracted. In the view of many in China, Chinese culture today has more to offer than visual arts, music and literature alone; it may also provide appealing alternative values in addressing international problems. Many Chinese people see potential in the traditional Chinese value of 'harmony', which could prove useful in addressing cultural clashes, and the corresponding value of 'harmony between nature and humankind', which could be used when confronting environmental problems.<sup>10</sup> Furthermore, harmony is directly linked with the official cornerstone of China's foreign policy: the theory of a Harmonious World (*hexie shijie*) which promotes China as a stable, reliable and responsible economic partner, a rising economic power that does not have to be feared.<sup>11</sup>

Joseph Nye's other sources of soft power—a country's political and social values, and its foreign policies<sup>12</sup>—are also discussed and evaluated. A growing number of Chinese academics raise the issue that, in particular when it comes to

---

8) 认清西方媒体卑鄙无耻的真面目' [The True Despicable and Shameless Face of Western Media], available online at [www.anti-CNN.com](http://www.anti-CNN.com).

9) See, for example, Hu Jintao's speech or the documents of the special meeting held in summer 2007 by the CPPCC on the topic of China's culture as a major resource for building China's soft power. See the CPPCC, available online at <http://cppcc.people.com.cn/GB/34961/90780/index.html>; and *Renmin Wang* [People's Net], available online at <http://cppcc.people.com.cn/GB/34961/45591/63417/6011383.html>.

10) Mingjiang, 'Soft Power in Chinese Discourse', p. 6.

11) See, for example, Spokesperson Liu Jianchao at the Foreign Ministry Press Conference of 13 November 2007, in answer to a question on the relation between peaceful development and soft power: 'We are ready to make joint efforts with people around the globe to build a harmonious world of lasting peace and common prosperity where nations will respect and consult each other on an equal footing politically, collaborate and complement each other economically, have better cultural exchanges and mutual emulation, seek common ground while shelving differences and build mutual trust and stronger cooperation on security'.

12) Joseph S. Nye, *Soft Power: The Means to Success in World Politics* (Cambridge MA: Perseus, 2004), pp. 11–14.

these resources, China's soft power has serious shortcomings.<sup>13</sup> Yan Xuetong, for example, stresses the need to strengthen China's 'institutions and social justice' as a basis for soft power.<sup>14</sup> Others point out that China is mainly importing books and academic works and concepts from abroad and hardly exports any. They see this as an illustration of the lack of Chinese ideas and values that are of interest for the outside world.<sup>15</sup> The so-called 'Beijing Consensus'<sup>16</sup> is often mentioned as an example of how China's political values are an important source of China's soft power in developing countries in Africa and Latin America. However, the 'Beijing Consensus' is not relevant for the case of Europe, and, moreover, has been more the subject of Western debates than of the Chinese discourse. The majority of both officials and scholars are reluctant to promote the Chinese experience as a model that should be followed by others. They assert that it is too early to conclude whether the model works well and stress that each country must find its own path.

### ***The Goals and Contents of China's Soft Power Projection towards Europe***

Enhancing ties with the European Union (EU) and individual European countries, and improving China's image in Europe, are part of China's overall foreign policy of building and strengthening relations with 'great powers'.<sup>17</sup> Chinese interests in Europe are mainly economically and politically oriented; direct mutual security interests remain limited. China aims at maintaining good

---

13) See also Wang Yiwei, 'Public Diplomacy and the Rise of China's Soft Power', *The ANNALS of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, vol. 616, no. 1, 2008, pp. 257–273.

14) Yan Xuetong, 'The Path for China to Increase its "Soft Power"', *China and World Affairs*, vol. 2, no. 1, April 2006; and Wang Haijing and Qian Chengdan, 'Zhidu jianshu chengqi ruan shili' [Institutional Building will Support Soft Power], *Liaowang Xinwen Zhoukan* [Outlook Weekly], vol. 11, 12 March 2007.

15) Mingjiang, 'Soft Power in Chinese Discourse', p. 9.

16) This term was coined by Joshua Ramo Cooper. It mostly refers to China's pragmatic and authoritarian development model, which shows that you can have economic development without far-reaching political reform, and which includes foreign aid and trade policies based upon non-interference in domestic affairs. See Joshua Ramo Cooper, *The Beijing Consensus* (London: Foreign Policy Centre, 2004).

17) See, for example, Avery Goldstein, *Rising to the Challenge: China's Grand Strategy and International Security* (Stanford CA: Stanford University Press, 2005), chapters 6 and 7; and Yang Jiechi, 'China's Diplomacy since the Beginning of Reform and Opening Up', *Foreign Affairs Journal*, no. 90 (Beijing: Chinese People's Institute of Foreign Affairs (CPIFA), 9 January 2007).

relations with the EU as well as with each individual European country. After the EU refrained in 2005 from lifting the European arms embargo against China—in China’s view as a result of US pressure—and furthermore failed to adopt the European Constitution, China concluded that it did not yet need to take the EU seriously as a foreign and security policy actor. These developments, combined with the fact that many European member states give priority to developing their own bilateral relations with China above working on a common EU approach, explain why China pays much attention to bilateral relations with major European powers such as France, the United Kingdom and Germany.

China has been strengthening its soft-power projection by rapidly developing public diplomacy strategies. In addition to redressing incidents and negative news, these strategies serve four major goals. First, China wants to be seen as a country that strives to build a harmonious society and that works hard to give its people a better future. It seeks understanding for, and recognition of, its political system and policies. Second, China wants to be seen as a stable, reliable and responsible economic partner, a rising economic power that does not have to be feared. This is the crux of China’s policy of good neighbourliness and the ‘harmonious world’ and ‘peaceful rise’ strategies. Third, Beijing wants China to be seen as a trustworthy and responsible member of the international political community, capable of and willing to contribute actively to world peace. Lastly, China wants to be acknowledged and respected as an ancient but vibrant culture.<sup>18</sup> Translated into domestic and pragmatic terms, China’s public diplomacy has to boost the Chinese Communist Party’s legitimacy as China’s central ruler and ‘serve the need of sustainable and steady economic and social development at home’.<sup>19</sup>

China’s public diplomacy in Europe focuses in the first place on building political trust by improving the image of China’s political system, its foreign policies and the human rights situation. Europe is very concerned about China’s domestic conditions; much more so, it appears, than the United States.<sup>20</sup> China recognizes Europe as a normative power and knows that human rights are a cornerstone of many European countries’ foreign policies. It is therefore not surprising that building political trust is more prominent in China’s public diplomacy in Europe than elsewhere in the world.<sup>21</sup> China is interested in learning

---

18) D’Hooghe, ‘Into High Gear’, pp. 43–44.

19) Jiechi, ‘China’s Diplomacy since the Beginning of Reform and Opening Up’.

20) David Shambaugh, Eberhard Sandschneider and Zhou Hong, ‘From Honeymoon to Marriage: Prospects for the China–Europe Relationship’, in David Shambaugh, Eberhard Sandschneider and Zhou Hong, *China–Europe Relations: Perceptions, Policies and Prospects* (London: Routledge, 2007), p. 311.

21) In the US, economic and security issues take front stage; in the Asian region, reassurance on economic issues is the main focus of China’s public diplomacy.

from—and cooperating with—Europe on issues like good governance and the rule of law, but does not want Europe to interfere in its policies. It does not seek to convince Europe of the superiority of its political and economic model, but it wants European leaders and audiences to recognize the Chinese model as a valid alternative for China, one that suits the Chinese circumstances best. Furthermore, Beijing wants to stop the harmful negativism about China. Europe's media have therefore become one of the major target groups of China's public diplomacy.

Second, China's public diplomacy in Europe addresses increasing fears of China's economic rise and tries to lure foreign investment. The EU is China's biggest trading partner and China's overall economic and trade interests in Europe are considerable. Beijing's public diplomacy needs to counter the rising European criticism of the increasing EU–China trade deficit and of Chinese trade barriers, and seeks to convince European audiences that (1) China's economic development offers opportunities for business and (2) that China deserves market-economy status.

Chinese embassies in major European capitals translate these overall goals into a more detailed public diplomacy strategy that is fine-tuned to the local situation. Chinese diplomats in European capitals are courting the local media and increasingly speak out on television and in local newspapers. China's leaders realize that more understanding of Chinese culture and ideas are an absolute prerequisite for acceptance by the international community. They feel that the negative views are mainly the result of lack of knowledge or misunderstanding of Chinese values and of the difficulties confronting China. As former Chinese President Jiang Zemin noted, 'it is absolutely necessary to know the basic Chinese values in order to have a good understanding of what has happened and what will happen in China'.<sup>22</sup> Chinese Foreign Minister Yang Jiechi wants to 'enable the general public in other countries to know China better', so that they 'better appreciate and support China's domestic and foreign policies'.<sup>23</sup>

The Chinese side often points out that the EU and China share many ideas on dealing with international issues: visions of a multi-polar world; a strong aversion to military action to solve crises; and a preference for a more balanced international order that is based on multilateralism. Both China and the EU advocate a leading role to be played by the United Nations, and they see China and Europe confronted with issues that 'require concerted efforts to cope with

---

22) Jiang Zemin's speech in Cambridge, 22 October 1999; see 'President Jiang Spells out Chinese Values', People's Daily Online, 23 October 1999.

23) Jiechi, 'China's Diplomacy since the Beginning of Reform and Opening Up'.

[...], such as the issues of globalization, climate change, terrorism, nuclear non-proliferation and epidemic diseases'.<sup>24</sup>

Although lack of knowledge about China among European publics<sup>25</sup> is certainly an important factor leading to negative European views of China, it is not the most important obstacle. A bigger problem is the enormous gap between European and Chinese ideas and values,<sup>26</sup> a factor that Chinese policy-makers often fail to grasp. There is less commonality in political thinking than perceived by the Chinese side. Beijing does not realize how deeply European societies are permeated by the values of democracy, human rights, rule of law and fundamental principles such as freedom of speech and freedom of demonstration, even if European societies' governments are willing to take a more pragmatic approach to ensure a country's material interests. Both sides may agree on international political goals such as multi-polarity, multilateralism and democratization, but their understanding of what exactly these concepts mean differs considerably. The Chinese have a realist, state-centric understanding of multilateralism; for the Europeans, multilateralism involves the sharing of sovereignty.<sup>27</sup> The Chinese discourse on democratization focuses on responsibility, responsiveness and government accountability;<sup>28</sup> while Europe regards it as a broad system that involves free media, an independent judiciary, rule of law and full respect for civil rights. These gaps in thinking cannot simply be explained away by providing European publics with more information. A long-term dialogue is needed to create understanding in Europe for the Chinese way of thinking. The media can, in principle, play an important role in this process, but—as discussed below—in China's case the media's effectiveness as a communicator to Western audiences is limited.

---

24) Ding Yuanhong (Former Ambassador of China to the EU), 'The Prospects for Sino-European Relations Remain Good', *Foreign Affairs Journal*, no. 87 (Beijing: CPIFA, 31 December 2008).

25) See, for example, 'China's Leadership Unknown to Many' of 18 April 2008, Website Gallup Poll and the Transatlantic Trends 2003 poll, German Marshall Fund, July 2003, Topline Data, p. 51. The latter shows that most people in the United Kingdom, Germany and France were unable to identify China as a country with a permanent seat on the Security Council of the United Nations.

26) The same is true for the European side, as will be discussed below.

27) See, for example, Christopher R. Hughes, 'Nationalism and Multilateralism in Chinese Foreign Policy: Implications for South-East Asia', *The Pacific Review*, vol. 18, no. 1, 2005, pp. 119–135.

28) See, for example, Wang Shaoguang, *Minzhu si jiang* [Four Lectures on Democracy] (Beijing: Sanlian Chubanshe/SDX Joint Publishing Company, 2008).



## The Receiving Side: European Perceptions

---

European perceptions of China are obviously heavily influenced by China's economic and political rise. China represents many opportunities as well as challenges for Europe in the economic realm. China offers a major export market, a destination for investment and production and a pool of cheap labour, but the country is also a competitor on foreign export markets and in the quest for resources. Furthermore, Europe is faced with a growing trade deficit with China and is unhappy about China's trade barriers, currency policy and enforcement of intellectual property rights. In the political realm, Europe considers China an important global player that has to be engaged and carefully guided into the international community by constant encouragement to step up its reforms, adopt internationally accepted norms and values and improve its domestic human rights situation. Europe realizes that many of today's problems, including the financial crisis and energy and climate change, require joint global action in which China has an important role to play.

Perceptions of China vary significantly per European country. This paper looks at just three of them: Germany; France; and the United Kingdom. The countries are selected because they are of political and economic significance to China, there is polling data available for all three, and their relations with China are well documented. The perception of China and of China's projected soft power within these three countries varies per target group, but as the available

polling results do not differentiate between these groups, this paper will focus on perceptions of the general public.

### ***Measuring European Perceptions of China***

There is no satisfactory way to measure a country's soft power. Soft power is not tangible and the results of changes in a country's soft power are only visible over time. There are a number of measurement instruments to indicate the success of a country's soft power, of which the opinion poll is regarded as the most useful because it is not limited to one aspect of soft power or to one specific target group. Other instruments include media analysis, number of tourists that visit China, number of foreign students in China and Chinese-language students in other countries, and data on the number and popularity of Chinese cultural events abroad. This paper mainly uses opinion polls to explore and indicate European perceptions of China's soft power. As discussed extensively elsewhere,<sup>29</sup> there are certain limitations to the use of opinion polls as an instrument to measure perceptions. Opinion poll outcomes are influenced by: (1) sample selection; (2) the way that questions are formulated and framed; and (3) the timing of the interview. People's perceptions are unstable and easily influenced by the spur of the moment. Table 1, which is based on a 2008 survey by the *Financial Times* and *Harris*, illustrates this fluidity: it shows considerable fluctuations in perceptions of China within short periods of time. The survey asked people on a monthly basis which country, if any, from a given list of countries was perceived as the greatest threat to global stability.

---

29) See, for example, the forthcoming book by Lee and Melissen (eds), *Soft Power and Public Diplomacy in East Asia*.

**Table 1: Percentage in the United Kingdom, France, and Germany that Thinks China is the Greatest Threat to Global Stability**

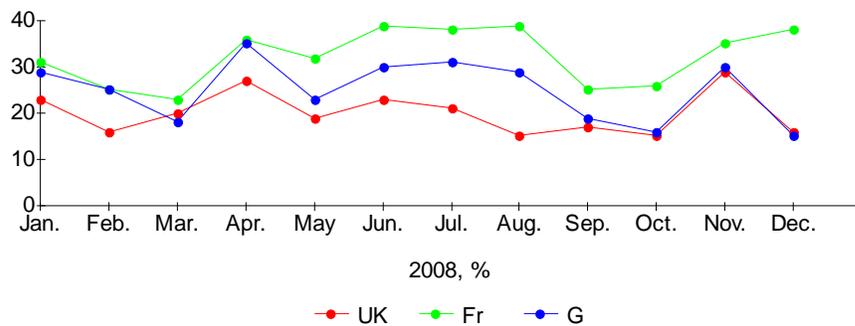


Table composed on the basis of the *Financial Times*/Harris Monthly Poll, 2008, available online at <http://www.harrisi.org/news/FTHarrisPoll.asp>.

In some cases the shifts in perceptions over the course of the year can be traced back to events in China. For example, the rise in apprehension about China in April 2008 is plausibly the result of China’s crackdown of the riots in Tibet in mid-March and the subsequent negative media reporting on China.<sup>30</sup> One month later, China’s swift and adequate reaction to the Sichuan earthquake, which was widely praised in the world press, likely contributed to the decrease in threat perception that is shown in the May 2008 results. In September 2008, however, the significant decrease in percentages of people in Germany and France who perceived China as a threat should be attributed to an event elsewhere in the world, for at this time Russia’s invasion of Georgia temporarily shifted fears from China to Russia. The fact that Russia suddenly topped the list of countries in the survey supports this assumption. A similar ‘external cause’ may partially explain China’s positive image earlier in this decade, because the fact that global attention was focused on negative feelings towards the United States after they started the war in Iraq in 2003, or towards Iran in 2005–2006 because of the nuclear crisis, is likely to have helped China stand out positively. This short note on the complexity of interpreting poll results does not alter the value of opinions poll for researching a country’s image, but illustrates that poll results are influenced by many factors and can only give a rough indication of people’s perceptions.

30) The April figures are the result of a poll conducted between 27 March and 8 April 2008.

### ***Overall Perceptions of China***

Opinion polls found that at the beginning of the decade, a majority of people surveyed in the three European countries had a relatively favourable image of China.<sup>31</sup> In recent years, however, China's popularity has been slipping. As Table 2 shows, British, French and German audiences have all become more negative towards China. The fall in popularity was the biggest in France, where the favourability percentage dropped from 60 per cent in 2006 to 28 per cent in 2008. Other polls largely confirm this pattern, although the Transatlantic Trends polls show a smaller decline in the United Kingdom.<sup>32</sup>

**Table 2: Percentage of People with a Positive View of China**

	Pew 2008	Pew 2007	Pew 2006	Pew 2005
Countries	%	%	%	%
United Kingdom	47	49	65	65
France	28	47	60	58
Germany	26	34	56	46

Sources: 'Global Public Opinion in the Bush Years (2001–2008)', 18 December 2008; 'Global Economic Gloom, China and India Notable Exceptions', 12 June 2008; 'Global Unease with Major World Powers', 27 June 2007, all from the *Pew Global Attitudes Project*, The Pew Research Centre, available online at <http://pewglobal.org/>.

The most recent available survey, which is based on interviews held in late 2008 and early 2009, shows that opinions continue to slide. This indicates that the Olympic Games in Beijing did not help to increase China's soft power.<sup>33</sup>

People do differentiate between China as a country—in fact China's government—and the Chinese people. When asked how they view the Chinese people, the figures are far more favourable than those for China as a country. Pew

31) For Chinese perceptions of Europe, see Zhu Liqun, 'Chinese Perceptions of the EU and the China–Europe Relationship', in David Shambaugh, Eberhard Sandschneider and Zhou Hong (eds), *China–Europe Relations: Perceptions, Policies and Prospects* (London: Routledge, 2007).

32) See, for example, BBC World Service Poll/PIPA/Globescan's 34-country poll conducted between 31 October and 25 January 2008, released 2 April 2008, and similar BBC surveys in earlier years; or *The Transatlantic Trends 2006* poll, German Marshall Fund.

33) BBC World Service Poll conducted by Globescan and PIPA, 'Views of China and Russia Decline in Global Poll', 6 February 2009.

(2008) finds that 65 per cent of the British held positive views of the Chinese people; in France and Germany the figures were 51 per cent and 46 per cent respectively, roughly 20 per cent higher than views of China as a country. The United Kingdom's relatively positive views stand out even more clearly in the percentages of respondents that give a negative assessment of Chinese people. In the UK a small group of only 16 per cent holds negative views of the Chinese people, but in France almost half of the people, 49 per cent, and in Germany 45 per cent thinks negatively about the average Chinese.

In the polls quoted above, respondents are not asked to explain their opinions. The figures therefore do not tell us much about why people have negative feelings about China and why they have changed their minds over time. The brief overview at the end of this section of bilateral relations between China and the European countries surveyed, and analysis of the results of more specific polling questions below, provide clues for further interpretation.

### ***Perceptions of China's Growing Influence***

Many people in Europe think that China will one day replace the United States as a superpower: roughly 50 per cent in the three surveyed countries according to Pew's 2008 poll. Interestingly, 15 per cent in France holds the opinion that China has already replaced the United States. Around one-third thinks China will never replace the US. In another poll, where a similar question is asked but then with the target date of 2020, it is mainly the French (47 per cent) that expect China to be the dominant power in 2020; the British and Germans are far less optimistic.

For many, China's rise translates into China's growing influence in their country. In 2008, a majority of those surveyed said that China is having a great deal or fair amount of influence on their country: 54 per cent in the United Kingdom; 61 per cent in France; and 55 per cent in Germany.<sup>34</sup> Only a small group thinks that China's influence is good; more people think of it negatively (Table 3).

---

34) 'Global Economic Gloom—China and India Notable Exceptions', 24-Nation Pew Global Attitudes Survey, 12 June 2008.

**Table 3: China's Influence in Your Country is a**

	Good Thing (%)	Bad Thing (%)
United Kingdom	12	21
France	5	27
Germany	8	23

Source: Pew Research Centre, 24-Nation Pew Global Attitudes Survey, 'Global Gloom', 12 June 2008.

The *Transatlantic Report 2006* finds that large majorities in the three countries perceive China's growing power as an 'important' to 'very important' threat<sup>35</sup>—not, however, a military threat. Large majorities are concerned about China's military power—74 per cent in the UK, 87 per cent in France and 81 per cent in Germany<sup>36</sup>—and various polls show that these worries have been growing steadily over recent years,<sup>37</sup> but this does not mean that China's military power is perceived as a direct threat to Europe. The 2007 Transatlantic Trends poll shows that 56 per cent in France and 57 per cent of interviewees in Germany and the UK do not see China as a military threat,<sup>38</sup> nor do they consider China an enemy. When given the choice between regarding China as a partner or an enemy, more people regard China as a partner. Most respondents, however, consider China as neither (see Table 4).

**Table 4: Is China More of a Partner or More of an Enemy?**

	Partner (%)	Enemy (%)	Neither (%)
United Kingdom	17	7	73
France	21	6	72
Germany	21	14	64

Source: Pew Global Attitudes Survey, 'Global Gloom', 12 June 2008.

---

35) The *Transatlantic Report 2006*, German Marshall Fund, p. 26 of the Trends Topline Data.

36) 'Global Economic Gloom', p. 43.

37) In addition to the Pew polls, the *Transatlantic Trends* reports of the German Marshall Fund show the same pattern.

38) German Marshall Fund, 'Transatlantic Trends 2007' (Washington DC: German Marshall Fund, 2007), available online at [www.transatlantictrends.org](http://www.transatlantictrends.org).

When asked about the impact of China’s growing economy, more people in the three countries think that China’s growing economy is a ‘bad thing’ rather than a ‘good thing’ for their own country (see Table 5), and majorities think that China is a competitor rather than a partner of their own country (see Table 6).

**Table 5: Influence of China’s Growing Economy on Your Country**

	Good thing (%)	Bad Thing (%)
United Kingdom	43	44
France	37	63
Germany	39	56

Source: Pew Global Attitudes Survey, ‘Global Gloom’, 12 June 2008.

**Table 6: Is China a Partner or a Competitor?**

	Partner (%)	Competitor (%)
United Kingdom	15	55
France	23	63
Germany	30	57

Source: The Harris Poll, no. 117, 21 November 2007.

When asked whether China represents more of an economic opportunity or an economic threat, a small majority in the United Kingdom regards China as an opportunity. In Germany and France the results were the opposite: far more people regard China as an economic threat than as an opportunity (see Table 7).

**Table 7: China as an Economic Threat or Economic Opportunity**

	Threat (%)	Opportunity (%)
United Kingdom	40	51
France	57	28
Germany	51	41

Source: ‘Transatlantic Trends 2007’, German Marshall Fund 2007, p. 35, available online at [www.transatlantictrends.org](http://www.transatlantictrends.org).

At the same time, however, 63 per cent of respondents in France are confident that the European economy can compete effectively against other rising economies in Asia, such as China and India; in the United Kingdom the figure is 41 per cent; and in Germany 45 per cent.<sup>39</sup>

Meanwhile, China has a serious problem where the issue of product safety is concerned. Even before the widely publicized powdered milk scandal of 2008, Europeans were aware of China's problems with the quality of its products. In 2007, majorities in the three European countries had heard of the recalls of Chinese toys and food products and more than 80 per cent of the people in Germany and France hold the opinion that products made in China are less safe than products made elsewhere. In the United Kingdom, however, only 50 per cent of people surveyed think so. This difference of more than 30 per cent cannot be explained by awareness, as the same poll shows that as many people in the United Kingdom as in France had heard about the problems with Chinese products.<sup>40</sup>

### ***The Impact of the Economic Crisis***

While new polls are not yet available, it can be expected that these perceptions may currently be undergoing another change. Since the economic and financial turmoil has taken the world in its grip, positions and perceptions are shifting and China suddenly stands out more positively. China holds the world's largest foreign currency reserves—1.9 trillion US dollars—and the stock exchanges in Shanghai and Shenzhen appear to suffer less from the crisis than stock markets elsewhere. Although the Chinese economy is hit hard by the fall in exports and millions of Chinese factory workers are losing their jobs, China is expected to be able to keep generating economic growth in the coming years. The world, including Europe, is thus looking towards China to play a major role in solving the crisis and many countries have knocked on Beijing's door for financial support. China has so far acted constructively, and in this light China's relatively positive financial situation has become a resource of soft power.

Beijing clearly exploited this position during Chinese Premier Wen Jiabao's European 'Tour of Confidence' in January and February 2009. Wherever he went, Premier Wen stressed China's confidence in its own policies and economic situation, its willingness to take responsibility in helping to solve the crisis and its readiness to cooperate with the international community in dealing with the

---

39) Harris Poll no. 94, 27 September 2007.

40) 'Global Economic Gloom', pp. 45–46.

crisis.<sup>41</sup> He also made sure that he fine-tuned his messages to the nature of each country's economic relationship with China. In Germany, for example, he focused on trade and technological cooperation. In London, Premier Wen mainly discussed financial cooperation and, with the London financial summit of April 2009 in mind, the need for reform of the global financial system.<sup>42</sup>

### *Perceptions of China's Foreign Policy and Diplomacy*

In the field of international relations, different ethics and ideals regularly lead to clashes between China and Europe. China's foreign policy is still largely based on the norms that were summarized in the 1950s in the Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence: national sovereignty and territorial integrity; non-aggression; peaceful coexistence; non-intervention in another country's internal affairs; and equality and mutual benefit. Although Chinese leaders realize and accept that some of these Westphalian concepts have become less valid in today's globalized world and are slowly introducing normative considerations into their foreign policies, these developments are not going fast enough for the European public. China's adherence to the principle of non-intervention in dealing with oppressive regimes collides with Western morality and the idea of the responsibility of humanitarian intervention. Europe accuses Beijing of putting economic and political interests above humanitarian considerations and does not yet have much confidence in China as a responsible stakeholder in the world. Strong majorities in the three surveyed European countries hold the view that China acts unilaterally and does not have much, or indeed any, consideration for the interests of other countries (see Table 8).

**Table 8: Does China Consider Interests of Countries like Yours?**

	Great deal/fair amount (%)	Not too much/not at all (%)
United Kingdom	22	71
France	17	82
Germany	37	59

Source: Pew Global Attitudes Survey, 'Global Economic Gloom', 12 June 2008.

41) See, for example, the interview with Wen Jiabao during his European trip, *Financial Times*, 2 February 2009.

42) Yan Wei, 'A Shot in the Arm: Premier Wen Jiabao's European Tour Reinvigorates China's Relations with Europe', *Beijing Review Online*, no. 6, 12 February 2009.

This is remarkable, as China puts much effort into promoting multilateralism and 83 per cent of Chinese people believe that China does take into account other countries' interests.<sup>43</sup>

Many people in Europe are of the opinion that Chinese President Hu Jintao has 'a great deal/some influence at the international level': 36 per cent in the United Kingdom; 56 per cent in France; and 45 per cent in Germany. However, they are not convinced that he is using this influence to 'do the right thing in world affairs'. A recent poll by *PIPA* shows the following results:

**Table 9: Confidence in Chinese President Hu Jintao to 'Do the Right Thing in World Affairs'**

	A lot/some confidence (%)	None at all/not too much (%)
United Kingdom	33	51
France	12	72
Germany	15	72

Source: PIPA, 'Assessing Leaders Worldwide', 29 June 2009.

These poll results illustrate the concern of European audiences with regard to China's foreign policy and diplomacy. Although Beijing has taken a number of steps to reform its foreign policy, and European leaders and scholars acknowledge that China increasingly contributes to global security and stability, European general publics remain to be convinced of China's goodwill.

### *Perceptions of China's Political Values*

The biggest liabilities of China's soft power in Europe are the country's political principles and values and the human rights situation. European audiences strongly disapprove of the Chinese regime's authoritarian nature, its prioritization of social and economic rights above political and civil rights, and Beijing's policy towards Tibet. China wants to persuade Europe that its ideas and values, which are brought together under the banner of 'socialism with Chinese characteristics' and 'Harmonious Society and Harmonious World', are legitimate choices in the Chinese situation. It argues that a person 'should be able to feed himself before

---

43) 'Global Economic Gloom', p. 39.

he can cast a ballot'.<sup>44</sup> But the idea that China is still a developing country, and hence should be allowed to give less priority to political and civil rights, bounces back on the wall of ideas that are prevalent in Europe—and the West in general—such as the need to respect fully human rights, independent of any developmental stage. Furthermore, European publics mainly see images of the developed coastal provinces and the rich and cosmopolitan cities of Beijing and Shanghai. They read in the newspapers that Chinese foreign currency reserves are the biggest in the world and find it difficult to accept China's claim that it is still a developing country.

Most Europeans hold the opinion that European governments should speak out about possible human rights abuses in China (see Table 10).

**Table 10: Percentage that Thinks that Europe is Right to Speak Out about Possible Human Rights Abuses in China, or Not**

	Is right to speak out (%)	Is not right to speak out (%)
United Kingdom	67	11
France	86	4
Germany	64	19

Source: The Harris Poll, no. 117, 21 November 2007.

Considerable percentages of Europeans think that their governments should even go one step further and link human rights to trade. *Transatlantic Trends 2005* shows that 64 per cent of respondents in France and 45 per cent in both Germany and the United Kingdom are of the opinion that the European Union should limit its economic relations with China because of human rights violations.

A political issue that has recently gained weight and has become detrimental to Chinese–European relations is Tibet. European publics have always been critical of China's policy towards Tibet, but before 2007 the issue was not much in the news. In the run-up to the Olympic Games, however, Tibet lobby groups and supporting organizations rallied much media attention for the Tibetan cause. European sympathy for Tibet was further increased by extensive media attention after the unrest in various parts of Tibet in March 2008. In May 2008, large majorities in Europe had heard 'a little to a lot' about the 'recent global protests surrounding the freeing of Tibet from Chinese rule': 88 per cent in the United Kingdom; 100 per cent in France; and 95 per cent in Germany.<sup>45</sup> Many

44) 'Human Rights Can Be Manifested Differently', *People's Daily*, 12 December 2005.

45) *Financial Times/Harris Poll*, May 2008.

Europeans find Tibet a very important issue. When asked in December 2008 which three from a list of world events in 2008 had been most significant, 33 per cent of respondents in France and 26 per cent in Germany mentioned the Tibet issue. In the United Kingdom, however, the figure was only 14 per cent. Interestingly, this event was the only one where a great difference in perceptions between European and American audiences was visible: in the United States the Tibet conflict was only mentioned by 7 per cent of respondents.<sup>46</sup> The Harris Poll finds that large majorities—53 per cent in the United Kingdom, 67 per cent in France and 74 per cent in Germany—hold the opinion that Tibet should not be under Chinese rule.

Polls on the 2008 Olympic Games in Beijing are another indicator of European perceptions of China’s policies and political situation. From the moment that Beijing won the Olympic bid, the Beijing Games have been closely linked with the situation in Tibet and China’s lack of human rights. This was partially a result of Beijing’s promise that hosting the Olympics would bring progress in China’s human rights situation, but also of the media attention that human rights organizations and Tibet lobby groups attracted in the run-up to the event. The Olympic Games were regarded as an important event by Europeans. When people had to choose the three most significant events of 2008, the Olympic Games in Beijing were often mentioned and ended higher in the three countries than, for example, the military conflict between Russia and Georgia.<sup>47</sup> The 2008 Pew poll shows that half of the respondents in the United Kingdom and Germany approved of the decision to hold the Olympics in China, but that a majority in France thought that it was a bad decision (see Table 11).

**Table 11: Decision to Hold the Olympics in China**

	Good Decision (%)	Bad Decision (%)
United Kingdom	50	38
France	45	55
Germany	50	47

Source: Pew Global Attitudes Survey, ‘Global Gloom’ Survey, 12 June 2008.

When asked in early May 2008 whether they supported or opposed the attendance of their political leader at the opening of the Olympic Games,

46) *Financial Times/Harris Poll*, 22 December 2008.

47) *Financial Times/Harris Poll*, 22 December 2008.

majorities in Germany (55 per cent) and France (54 per cent) opposed the attendance, while the figure for the United Kingdom was 43 per cent.<sup>48</sup>

### *Perceptions of China's Culture*

As noted earlier, Chinese policy-makers regard culture as the most important source of China's soft power. President Hu has publicly called for the enhancement of culture as a part of China's soft power,<sup>49</sup> and in summer 2007 the CPPCC held a special meeting on the topic of China's culture as a major resource for building China's soft power.<sup>50</sup> These policy statements are clearly put into practice in the case of Europe. China invests greatly in promoting Chinese arts and the Chinese language in Europe. At EU level, a policy dialogue on culture between the European Commission and China has recently been established and in May 2009 an EU–China Cultural Industries Forum was launched.

The Chinese Ministry of Culture and private organizations organize innumerable exhibitions, festivals, Chinese cultural projects (such as the China Culture Year) and Chinese New Year events in Europe. Examples of major Chinese cultural events include: China–France Culture Year 2003; the 2008 year-long 'China Now' festival in the UK; the 2009 Europalia Chinese Art Festival in various European countries; and China's participation as guest of honour at the 2009 Frankfurt Book Fair in Germany. China reaches large audiences in Europe with these activities. In the area of culture, non-state or less official actors—such as Chinese artists, friendship organizations and organizations of overseas Chinese—are allowed to play a part. The potential role of these groups in the promotion of Chinese culture is clearly being explored by the Chinese government,<sup>51</sup> in particular when it comes to folk culture and traditions such as Chinese New Year celebrations. China's arts institutes are active in

---

48) Financial Times/Harris Poll, May 2008.

49) Part VII of Hu Jintao's report to the 17th Party Congress. See also 'Hu Jintao Calls for Enhancing "Soft Power" of Chinese Culture', online press centre of the 17th National Congress of the Communist Party of China, 15 October 2007, available online at <http://english.cpcnews>.

50) See the websites (in Chinese) of the CPPCC: <http://cppcc.people.com.cn/GB/34961/90780/index.html>; and RenminWang [People's Net] at <http://cppcc.people.com.cn/GB/34961/45591/63417/6011383.html>, accessed in October 2007. See also Ingrid d'Hooghe, 'Into High Gear', pp. 44–46.

51) 'Li Shijie: fahui hairwai huaren shetuan zuoyong, cu zhonghua wenhua zouxiang shijie' [Li Shijie: Bring Overseas Chinese Organizations into Play, Urge China's Culture to Head for the World], speech by Li Shijie at the CPPCC meeting of 24 July 2007, available online at <http://cppcc.people.com.cn/GB/34961/90780/90789/6030216.html>.

expanding cultural cooperation with Europe as well. A good example is the annual European–Chinese Cultural Dialogue between the Chinese Academy of Arts and the European Union National Institutes for Culture (EUNIC).

China has furthermore established a considerable number of Confucius Institutes in Europe, including ten in France, nine in Germany and seventeen in the United Kingdom.<sup>52</sup> To what extent they will really become a force in promoting Chinese culture is too early to tell; at the moment they mainly focus on providing Chinese-language classes. In all three countries, an increasing number of elementary and middle schools include Chinese in their language curriculum. The number of European students of the Chinese language has been on the rise for years and is still booming.<sup>53</sup>

However, public admiration for China’s cultural expressions and interest in learning the Chinese language do not automatically lead to greater support for, or understanding of, China’s policies. The question of how the projection of cultural soft power results in achieving specific policy goals is vague at best and often not dealt with by the Chinese side at all.

---

52) See Confucius Institute Online, available at <http://www.confuciusinstitute.net/>.

53) See, for example, ‘*Yingyu guxiang hanyu re, 500 suo zhongxiaoxue kaishe hanyu ke*’ [Chinese-Language Fever on English Homelands: 500 Primary and Middle Schools Offer Chinese-Language Classes], website of the *Hanban* (executive body of the Chinese Language Council International), 25 November 2008; for France, see Martine Laronge, ‘*L’enseignement du chinois progresse de 30% par an*’ (Chinese-language education increases by 30% per year), *Le Monde*, 6 February 2008.

## Analysis of the Poll Results

---

The poll findings used for this paper do not provide us with detailed and clear-cut answers to the question of how the various elements of China's soft power are perceived in the three European countries under survey: the United Kingdom, France and Germany. Other than the 'Soft Power in Asia' poll by the Chicago Council on Global Affairs, the surveys conducted in Europe were not specifically focused on the topic of 'soft power' and were not as detailed. In spite of these limits, the available polls show certain trends in European perceptions of China. They also tell us something about the effectiveness of China's soft power. Conclusions can be drawn, in particular when polls by different organizations find similar trends.

The differences in poll results between the three countries largely reflect the different character of their bilateral relationships with China, and a few words on these relations are therefore required.

### *The Three Major European Powers' Relationships with China*

In the first half of this decade, the three European countries' relations with China all developed smoothly. Their government leaders at the time—Schröder, Blair and Chirac—generally put economic interests first and aimed to avoid

controversial issues. In recent years, however, this situation has changed. While British Prime Minister Gordon Brown (from 2007 until the present) continued his predecessor Blair's pragmatic approach towards China, new leaders in Germany and France initiated a shift in their country's policy towards China.

When Angela Merkel took over as German Chancellor in 2005, she announced a foreign policy that is based on human rights. She cannot afford, however, to ignore Germany's commercial interests. The economic and trade relationship with China is of great importance for Germany, which has a strong business lobby. Germany is China's largest European trading partner and China is Germany's most important economic partner in Asia. Furthermore, China is Germany's second biggest export market outside Europe. In 2007, the value of Germany's exports to China—29.9 billion—was more than three times that of France and nearly six times that of the UK.<sup>54</sup> Although Merkel's room for manoeuvring is thus limited, she clearly takes a tougher stand against China than her predecessor, Schröder: in spite of China's heavy protest and pressure, Merkel received the Dalai Lama in the Chancellor's Office in 2007; and at the beginning of 2008, Merkel was the first European leader to announce that she would not attend the opening of the Olympic Games in Beijing. Since these incidents, Sino-German relations have been bumpy.

French relations with China saw similar changes after President Nicolas Sarkozy took office in 2006. Starting off well with major economic deals, relations soon took a downturn when Sarkozy threatened to boycott the opening ceremony of the Beijing Olympic Games. They deteriorated further when the Olympic Torch relay in Paris was disrupted by protesters who molested the Chinese torch-bearing wheelchair-bound athlete. China accused Paris of not having done enough to prevent the disruption and China's population called, with success, for a boycott of French products and services. A low point in the relationship was reached in December 2008 when Sarkozy, who held the European Presidency at the time, infuriated Beijing by meeting with the Dalai Lama. As a result, the EU–China summit was cancelled and for a few months France was ostensibly ignored by Beijing.

Sino-British relations have remained stable throughout the decade. The United Kingdom, which has identified improvement of its relations with China as 'a major priority' in the years to come,<sup>55</sup> is China's largest European investor. Furthermore, mutual educational and science exchanges are the strongest in Europe. The UK's economic cooperation with China focuses on financial services

---

54) John Fox and Francois Godement, *A Power Audit of EU–China Relations* (London: European Council on Foreign Relations (ECFR), 2009), p. 33.

55) See the strategy document on relations with China entitled *UK–China: A Framework of Engagement*, issued by the British Foreign Office in January 2009.

and hi-tech equipment. Just like his predecessor Blair, UK Prime Minister Gordon Brown has been able to avoid major incidents and upheavals in the relationship with China. Although Brown also met with the Dalai Lama in May 2008, Britain was neither ‘punished’ nor severely criticized by China for doing so. Brown had saved China’s face by meeting the Dalai Lama at the home of the Archbishop of Canterbury and not at the prime minister’s office at 10 Downing Street. Brown did not attend the opening ceremony of the Olympic Games, but he travelled to Beijing for the closing ceremony. Here, again, he saved China’s face by informing Beijing of his plans in a timely manner and by telling the media that his decision had nothing to do with a boycott.

### ***Interpreting the Poll Results***

China’s high favourability rating in Europe at the beginning of this decade rapidly declined after 2006. The ‘China-hype’ of the late 1990s and the beginning of this decade has gradually changed into fear of a rising China and dissatisfaction with the slow pace of China’s political reform and the human rights situation in China. The decline is greatest in Germany and France, reflecting their bumpy relations with China in recent years, just as the more positive views in the United Kingdom mirror the UK’s more stable relations with China.

Most Europeans differentiate between China as a country—that is, the Chinese leadership—and the Chinese people. The Chinese people are regarded more positively, although remarkably large percentages in Germany and France think negatively about the Chinese population too. A likely reason for France’s high figure is the strong anti-France reaction of the Chinese population and subsequent boycott of French products and supermarkets in China immediately after the anti-China incident during the Olympic Torch relay in Paris. Why many people in Germany have negative feelings about the Chinese population is less obvious, although a possible explanation can be found in the large amount of critical media attention for China in Germany in recent years.<sup>56</sup>

Large percentages of people in Europe worry about China’s economic influence on their country and are anxious about the consequences of China’s economic growth for their country’s employment and industry.<sup>57</sup> Here, again, the apprehension is biggest in France and Germany and lowest in the United Kingdom. In view of its large exports to China, this is not unexpected in the case

---

56) See, for example, the covers of the German magazine *Der Spiegel* on 8 August 2005; 27 March 2006; 11 September 2006; 27 August 2007; and 7 April 2008.

57) For Germany see, for example, ‘*Tagesschau Chat mit Eberhard Sandschneider*’, ARD, 18 March 2008.

of Germany. The figure for France is somewhat surprising, however, as Sino-French trade has developed positively and France is the most confident of the three that the European economy can compete successfully with rising economies in Asia. The issue of product safety in China is a problem of enormous proportions for Beijing: the image that Chinese products are less safe seems strongly established in Europe.

People in Europe are also concerned about China's military growth but they perceive China as neither an enemy nor as a military threat. This outcome is to be expected, as Europe and China do not share direct security interests. When asked about their perceptions of China in relation to global stability, a small minority in the three European countries answered that they perceive China as a threat.

The outcomes of the polls confirm the importance of normative considerations in Europe. Large majorities in the three European countries are concerned about China's unilateral behaviour, the human rights situation and China's policy towards Tibet. Media attention in the run-up to the Olympic Games in Beijing raised awareness of these issues in Europe and strengthened negative feelings. Many Europeans agree with the statement that their leaders should speak out on human rights and that human rights should be linked to trade. The fact, however, that a considerable group in Germany remains against raising human rights issues when meeting with China's leaders is related to the big German economic and business stakes in China, as mentioned above.<sup>58</sup>

The Beijing Olympic Games as a tool to strengthen China's soft power have only been partially successful. The gains for China were the strengthening of its image as a powerful and capable country and as a country with a rich culture, but with regard to normative issues, the Olympics seem to have done more harm than good.

---

58) See also 'Baiting the Dragon: German Business Warns of Pushing China Too Far', *Spiegel Online International*, 18 April 2008.

## The Limits of China's Soft Power in Europe

---

The projection of China's soft power in Europe encounters a number of problems. China's messages do not enter neutral territory in Europe. China has to fight many negative perceptions and these are difficult to change. In particular, Europe's strong normative considerations pertaining to political and civil rights, and democracy, form a fundamental barrier against China's public diplomacy. These negative perceptions spring from conflicting values, preconceived notions, a lack of knowledge of China and its policies, and underlying fears of a rapidly rising power. Good public diplomacy can, to a certain extent, tackle these causes of negative image. Even when it comes to conflicting values, a long-term socialization process may contribute to more understanding for China's values. In order to become more effective, however, China's public diplomacy has to become more credible.

### ***The Main Obstacle to a Successful Chinese Public Diplomacy: The Lack of Credibility***

Lack of credibility is a major problem for China's public diplomacy. First, the problem concerns China's public diplomacy actors. In the words of journalism professor Gong Wenxiang: 'If the medium lacks credibility, it is unthinkable that it will improve the country's image'.<sup>59</sup> The issue of credibility is closely linked to the character of China's political system and its ideas about public diplomacy, which are largely based on a state-centred hierarchical model of diplomacy. In the state-centred model, the state is the major messenger of soft power. State organizations, however, are seldom trusted as messengers and China's government is trusted even less by foreign audiences. This is a consequence of the non-democratic nature of China's government and its opaque political decision-making, which raises questions about the legitimacy of the Chinese government to speak for its people. Furthermore, it is the result of the Chinese government's well-known use of propaganda<sup>60</sup> in recent history to deceive both its own population and the international community. China's government seeks to create and control the flow of information from China to the outside world in order to keep its dirty laundry out of public view and craft an ideal image of China. The idea that the image projected should be a perfect picture with little room for mistakes and ugliness, including for the diversity in society, is deeply embedded in China's culture.

These mechanisms of maintaining control over its society seriously hamper the growth of China's soft power and damage cautious international impressions that China is moving towards a more open society. At the same time, however, Beijing does acknowledge that non-state actors such as civil society organizations, business communities, universities, research institutions and individuals of standing have a role to play,<sup>61</sup> and in daily practice they are already doing so.<sup>62</sup> A growing number of organizations and individuals are moving beyond the promotion of the official positive line on China's politics and strife to discuss China's problems frankly. Their open minds and critical remarks are noticed in

---

59) Cited in Peter Ford, 'Beijing Launching a "Chinese CNN" to Burnish Image Abroad', *Christian Science Monitor*, 5 February 2009.

60) Propaganda is defined as a deceptive and manipulative process, based on false or non-verifiable information, whereas public diplomacy is based on open sources of information.

61) See, for example, Zha Qizheng, 'Better Public Diplomacy to Present a Truer Picture of China', *People's Daily*, online edition, 30 March 2007.

62) See d'Hooghe, 'Into High Gear', pp. 50–52.

the international community and by portraying a more genuine picture of China they become credible messengers. In challenging the limits of their academic or cultural freedom, they contribute to China's soft power by showing the world that there is plurality in China's society. Some explicitly recognize the need to leave the traditional approach behind, make the Chinese media more open and promote exchanges of non-governmental organizations (NGOs). The scholar Yu Xintian, for example, sees the lack of internationally active NGOs in China as a 'blind spot' of Chinese soft power.<sup>63</sup> However, the role of non-state or independent actors in China's public diplomacy is still limited.

The majority of China's soft-power messengers are, in one way or another, censured by Beijing. This is particularly true for the instrument that China regards as most important for projecting its soft power: the Chinese media. Chinese Politburo Standing Committee Member Li Changchun recently called for strengthening of China's domestic and international communication capacity in order to 'promote China's cultural soft power'.<sup>64</sup> This call was soon followed by the announcement of plans to spend US\$ 6.6 billion on extending China's international media outreach by creating a new international news channel that should be able to compete with CNN, Al Jazeera and the BBC.<sup>65</sup> The new television station should counter the negative coverage of China in the West and convey a positive image to the world by explaining China's view on world affairs. However, media are credible only when they are independent and adhere to journalistic ethics. A new generation of Chinese journalists aims at achieving these goals and the government sometimes turns a blind eye to their publications, but these journalists know that they always have to operate carefully and stay within certain political boundaries.

China's behaviour during the Beijing Olympic Games of August 2008 illustrates China's problem with credibility. Although successful in projecting the image of a capable and technologically advanced world power, the Olympic

---

63) Yu Xintian, 'The Role of Soft Power in China's External Strategy', *Global Review*, Trial Issue, 2007, pp. 126–127.

64) Li Changchun, the member of China's Politburo Standing Committee who is responsible for ideology and communication, recently said that strengthening China's domestic and international communication capacity determines China's international influence and position, promotes China's cultural soft power and affects the role and position of the Chinese media in world opinion. See Li Changchun, 'Nuli goujian xiandai chuanbo, tigao guonei guowai chuanbo nengli' [Work Hard to Build a Modern Communication System and Raise our Domestic and International Communication Capacity], 20 December 2008, available online at [http://news.china.com/zh\\_cn/news100/11038989/20081223/15248144.html](http://news.china.com/zh_cn/news100/11038989/20081223/15248144.html), accessed 2 February 2009.

65) Vivian Wu and Adam Chen, 'Beijing in 45b Yuan Global Media Drive', *South China Morning Post*, 13 January 2009.

Games failed to increase China's credibility. In the eyes of most European observers, the promises by Chinese officials that the Games would help to advance human rights conditions in China were not fulfilled. On the contrary, controls over society were tightened, dissent was stifled and demonstrations were prevented or punished with arrests. Beijing had to be strongly reminded to give the foreign press the promised full access to the World Wide Web. It also provided reporters with incorrect information about the programme of the Olympic Games' opening ceremony. It was not the fact that the organizing committee had pre-recorded certain parts of the ceremony that led to indignation in Europe, but the fact that the committee had presented these parts as taking place live. The same was felt with regard to the young girl who was reported to have sung live, but later turned out to have lip-synched a song performed by a girl who was considered not beautiful enough to take the limelight. Chinese officials did not understand what the fuss was all about, but audiences worldwide—interestingly, including the Chinese public—felt betrayed and did not understand the Chinese government's pursuit of total perfection. These seemingly small incidents were reported all over the globe, confirming impressions that China's government cannot be trusted to tell the truth.

### ***Perceptions of China: A Matter of Soft or Hard Power?***

This paper looked at the projection of China's soft power, but many aspects of China's statecraft and diplomacy that are often interpreted as soft power are in fact based on China's economic and political might. In these cases it would be more appropriate to speak of the soft aspects of China's hard power rather than of soft power as defined by Joseph Nye. Although developing soft power has gradually gained prominence in China over the past decade, developing hard power is still a major component in strengthening China's comprehensive national power. In that sense it may be argued that China, like the United States, aims at becoming a 'smart power': a power that complements its economic and military weight with greater investments in soft power.<sup>66</sup>

Gregory Treverton and Seth Jones suggest that, rather than divide power into 'hard' and 'soft', we should look at power 'along a continuum from coercion at one end, to persuasion or attraction at the other, with bribery or economic

---

66) For the concept of smart power, see CSIS Commission on Smart Power, *CSIS Commission on Smart Power: A Smarter More Secure America* (Washington DC: Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS), 2007).

inducements perhaps in the middle'.<sup>67</sup> This approach may suit China's case best. In Europe, the centre of gravity of China's power is found somewhere in that middle. Europeans are not attracted by China's ideas and values, nor are they concerned about China's military hard power. China's power and influence in Europe are based on European expectations that Europe will benefit, both politically and economically, from expanding and deepening relations with China.

---

67) Gregory F. Treverton and Seth G. Jones, *Measuring National Power* (Santa Monica CA: Rand Corporation, 2005), p. 10.



## Conclusions

---

China's soft power in Europe has much to gain. The time when Europeans were willing to give a rising China the benefit of the doubt has gone. Views of China were favourable in the early years of this decade, when people were optimistic about political reform in China and confident about the economic opportunities that China could offer. Moreover, at that time, European worries about the global situation focused on the unilateral behaviour of the United States. That began to change in the latter half of 2006 when the Europe–China honeymoon was clearly over and the European Union started to take a tougher stand towards China.<sup>68</sup> The idea that political reform would automatically follow economic reform in China began to be doubted and Europe increasingly worried about China's international intentions, human rights situation and the growing European–Chinese trade deficit.<sup>69</sup> Around the same time, media attention on China intensified in the run-up to the Beijing Olympic Games. China stood at the centre of attention and proved unable to live up to its promises of more openness and improvement of human rights. During the two weeks of the Olympics, the perfect organization and cultural splendour dazzled the world, but could not hide the

---

68) See, for example, the Communication of the European Commission on China of 24 October 2006.

69) See, for example, Shambaugh, Sandschneider and Zhou, 'From Honeymoon to Marriage'.

tight control over society and lack of full openness. The aim of creating a perfect image was pushed too far and European scepticism about freedom in China was easily confirmed.

China's growing negative image in Europe—as shown by polls in the United Kingdom, France and Germany—cannot simply be 'fixed' by intensifying and expanding current activities in the field of soft-power projection. Beijing needs to rethink its strategy as a whole. China has to realize that, no matter how much money it spends on expanding its communication capacity, it will not be of much help as long as Beijing does not deal with its problem of credibility. The Chinese government has to accept that it is not considered a credible messenger and that it needs to step back and let other voices speak. Moreover, these voices should be allowed to discuss China's problems and ugly sides as well. China's capacity and introspective ability to criticize itself—elements of the concept of 'meta-soft power' as put forward by Joseph Nye—are still limited and need to be further developed. Furthermore, the projection of soft power needs to be matched by deeds.<sup>70</sup> European audiences will not only have to hear about positive developments in China from credible messengers, but they also need to see them represented in China's behaviour and policies. Last but not least, a long-term socialization process needs to take place in order to remove preconceived notions of China and make European publics more open-minded towards China's ideas and messages.

In his book *The Paradox of American Power*, Nye identifies what kind of countries would best succeed in projecting soft power in the current age: countries whose dominant culture and ideas are closer to prevailing norms; whose credibility is enhanced by their domestic and international performance; and those with most access to multiple channels of communication and thus more influence over how issues are framed.<sup>71</sup> As this Clingendael Diplomacy Paper has illustrated, China does not fit this model and still has a long way to go before it will be able to project its soft power successfully in Europe.

Without detailed polls such as those of the 2008 'Soft Power in Asia' project being available for Europe, it is difficult to determine to what extent the European attraction or aversion to China is the result of China's hard power, soft power, lack of soft power, or international factors beyond China's control. In Europe, the crux of China's power and influence seems to be found in the middle of the continuum of power that is suggested by Treverton and Jones, with coercion at one side, attraction at the other end, and economic inducements in the middle. China's current influence in Europe is based on European expectations that it will

---

70) See d'Hooghe, 'Into High Gear', pp. 52–57.

71) Joseph Nye, *The Paradox of American Power: Why the World's Only Superpower Can't Go it Alone* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002), p. 69.

benefit on all fronts from expanding and deepening relations with China, not on attraction to Beijing's ideas and values. China induces interest and support in Europe not as a hard or soft power, but as a rising global player inspiring fear as much as hope.

# Clingendael Diplomacy Papers

- 
- Iran's relations with China and the West: Cooperation and Confrontation in Asia*  
by Willem van Kemenade November 2009 129pp., ISBN 978-90-5031-1472
- The Public Diplomacy of Federated Entities: Excavating the Quebec Model*  
October 2009 40pp., ISBN 978-90-5031-1441
- Towards a Political Islam* Roel Meijer, July 2009, 50pp., ISBN 9789050311
- Projecting Economic Power: Japan's Diplomacy towards North Korea* by Maaïke Okano- Heijmans, February 2009, 34pp., ISBN-978-90-5031-1397
- Diplomatic Theory of International Relations* by Paul Sharp, January 2009, 34 pp., ISBN-9789050311335
- The Power of War: Why Europe Needs It* by Peter van Ham, December 2008, 29 pp., ISBN-9789050311342
- Ending the North Korean Nuclear Crisis*, edited by Koen De Ceuster & Jan Melissen, November 2008, 126 pp., ISBN-9789050311311
- Sustainable Diplomacy and the US-Iranian Conflict* by Paul Sharp, October 2008, 37 pp., Price 8,50, ISBN-9789050311298
- Détente Between China and India; The Delicate Balance of Geopolitics in Asia* by Willem van Kemenade, July 2008, 225 p., Price 25,00, ISBN-9789050311274
- Bridge the Gap or Mind the Gap? Culture in Western-Arab Relations* by Maurits Berger *et al.*, January 2008, 56 p., Price 10,00, ISBN-9789050311236
- Japan's Economic Diplomacy towards China: The Lure of Business and the Burden of History* by Maaïke Okano-Heijmans, November 2007, 56 p., Price •10,00, ISBN-13 9789050311199

*Crossroads of Diplomacy: New Challenges, New Solutions* by Marija Manojlovic and Celia Helen Thorheim, October 2007, 42 p., Price •8,00, ISBN-13 9789050311882

*The Rise of China's Public Diplomacy* by Ingrid d'Hooghe, July 2007, 38 p., Price •8,00, ISBN-13 9789050311175

*Caught in the Middle; UN Involvement in the Western Sahara Conflict* by Jérôme Larosch, May 2007, 29 p., Price •8,00, ISBN-13 9789050311121

*City Diplomacy: The Expanding Role of Cities in International Politics* by Rogier van der Pluijm, April 2007, 45 p., Price •8,00, ISBN-13 9789050311168

*China and Japan: Partners or Permanent Rivals?*, by Willem van Kemenade, November 2006, 98 p., Price •16,00, ISBN-10 9050311113/ISBN-13978 9050311113

*Religion and Development Aid; The Special Case of Islam*, by Maurits S. Berger, October 2006, 28 p. Price •8,00, ISBN-10 9050311083/ISBN-13 978 9050311083

*Human Rights' Dialogue in ASEM; Do NGOs Have a Role to Play?*, by Simone Eysink, September 2006, 27 p. Price: •8,00, ISBN-10 9050311091/ISBN-13 9789050311090

*India's Road to Development*, by Roel van der Veen, June 2006, 60 p. Price: •16,00, ISBN 9050311075

*Public Diplomacy: Improving Practice*, by Ashvin Gonesh and Jan Melissen, December 2005, 22 p. Price: •8,00, ISBN 9050311059

*UN Reform and NATO Transformation: The Missing Link*, by Dick A. Leurdijk, October 2005, 35 p. Price: 11,50, ISBN 905311040

*Rethinking Track Two Diplomacy: The Middle East and South Asia*, by Dalia Dassa Kaye, June 2005, 31 p. Price: •8,00, ISBN 9050311016

*Wielding Soft Power: The New Public Diplomacy*, by Jan Melissen, May 2005, 30 p. Price: 7,50 ISBN 90503110982